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POEMS 1921-1931

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1921-1931

ANNE FREMANTLE



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the poems in this book.

CUIP IO DISSOLVI

O frozen water, whom no arctic sunrise
Has driven, foaming avalanche to sea;
Cannot my kisses rouse your sleepy eyelids
Still downwards bent, to lift your eyes to me?

Child, like to sleeping fawn in mazéd forest
Long have I poured my passion on your face;
To rid me of my longing I would fling it
Into your heart's green turquoise marbled place.

Meanwhile, afar in sunless twilight,
Dreaming Heaven's opal to avanturine.
You weave your bridal vestments of spun crystal
I kiss your feet and sing a song of mine.

Sing of the passion and the tireless hunger
In the grave eyes of mitred priest at Mass,
When in his hands he worships Israel's Master,
And Calvary has come again to pass.

You smile—but when, some day, I want no
longer,
Your body, dearest, that I loved of old,
My song will fail, but my reward will follow—
When every woman's scented hair grows cold.

For then wakes passion lover cannot fathom;
Then wakes desire no mass can satisfy.
I know and greet it—but you may not listen—
Too pure, you cannot grasp the wish to die!

FEAST' OF SAINT MICHAEL

White lilies for the captain of high heaven
White souls for soldiers? Nay,
Passion stained, buffeted, uncrowned,
Men who have fought their way.

Those who have striven to storm the gates,
Who won, perhaps, or lost
A place in hell—a place in heaven,
And knew, nor counted cost.

Not timid, pale, oft-shriven souls
No souls that “stand and wait”
Only those wounded in God's fight
Shall enter Michael's gate.

White lilies for her fields—for Mary's gold—
But Michael's sword waves high,
To welcome blood-stained charioteers
Who yet have learnt to die!

MILAN CATHEDRAL

The church is empty. All the guests are gone.
Infinity remains to crowd the space
Between the fluted columns. The lamps burn
Lonelily, fearing to reveal the face
Portrayed above them; From the cross looks
down
He who forever watches in that place.

FUERE

Lavarone-Pergine

Here, where they tore men's limbs with nails
They lift Christ's body high;
Here—where with lust of blood men cried.
Mad, and were fain to die.

Here, where the Austrian guns poured steel
Cyclamen scent the air;
Where starving men ate flowers for bread,
Goats browse—they do not care.

Here, where the thunder of shrapnel shook
The eternal hills, the moon
Smiles, because men and beasts and earth
Forget it all—so soon.

TU SCIS . . . QUIA AMO TE

Am I to give my body to be burned
Cry with Aeneas: "Troy was, and I am",
To prove I love you? Could you but have learned
That I would leave the carcase where I dwell
To crawl to you beneath the gates of Hell,
Begging to follow—faithful—where you go—
Ah, little heart, an exile loves you so.

Sonnets I cannot write—to etch your face
With driving red-hot lines into their hearts
Who know you not. So high a courage, such
fair grace,
Lives for itself—alone. I loved you—high
Pinnacled tower of sunset—crowned to die.
You called me—and I came. Now bid me leave
This body that I weary of. I grieve
To live, for you are dead. Now faint, now loud,
Thunders the sterile cry of charity
Beating within the tired caves and echoing. . .
Ah, little heart, an exile loves you so.

“NOR CAST ONE LONGING, LINGERING
LOOK BEHIND?”

Scent of Italian snows in April
October mellowed earth in England's fields,
The early hours, and mists among the moor-
lanes,
And all the purple glory twilight yields,
Shall I find these in Asphodel-starred Heavens
Riding with Michael's armies 'cross the sky,
Will Heaven give back to me my red June roses
When they are faded on the grave wherein I lie?

“SI QUIS, QUID AGAM, FORTE REQUIRAT
ERIT, VIVERE ME DICES”

Tell them I wake the whole world with my dreams
 Bid night fall with my sleep,
Play with the thundering clamour of the spheres
 Of God's own harvest reap.

Tell them for me God lives, for me, God died —
 “My work?” They ask—God say
I bear the gates of Hercules—I am—
 This my work, day by day.

And when at last, they need no longer ask
 When dust to dust I give;
Go, shout to pitying skies and silent seas,
 Go, tell the world, I live!

PRE-EXISTANCE

There are green weeds in the pond, and waterlilies
And to me those green weeds seem
A muddy echo of some pre-existence,
Thin hauntings of a dream.

Was I a toad, and were those green things Heaven?
Drowning, and these Hell's gates?
Why should they move me, far beyond all thinking,
All former loves and hates?

And waterlilies, . . . on what far-off island,
In what clear pool or lake
Did I with magic kiss their face quicken
And watch these strange things wake?

Who knows? strange glimmerings, strange stories
Where forgotten things have trod—
And would I were where only I could learn them
Where now they are—with God.

MIMOSA

Beside the red tiles of the tube
A beggar stands to sell his ware
Scented mimosa from the south,
I know . . . for I have seen it there.

I saw its gold dust blown across
The thick blue Adriatic sky;
Incense earth gave at Christmastide,
Gold censers full the wind flung high.

Besmirched the flowers, their pale scent gone,
Their gold and incense spent in vain;
They have but myrrh to offer now—
But myrrh . . . in London mist and rain.

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EINSTEIN I

You are long dead. Now are your proud eyes tame
Your hair is tarnished, your full lips are cold
For centuries unkissed,—or now aflame
For high immortal lovers? — —

.

I have you here, your head upon this lace
Whilst your eyes leap to look upon my lips;
You tear the fastenings of my dress, it slips . . .
Was it this night I felt your burning face
Prest close upon me? or was't yesternight?
It matters not, we two are very near
Nay . . . heart on heart.

Silent the dawn breaks, clear:
The morning light has blinded me—your eyes
Are far withdrawn. Must the sun always rise?

TO HAYDN.

When all God's sons shouted aloud for joy
What time the dawning of the worlds began ;
You shared their mirth, interpreted God's smile
In music ; cried, " 'Tis good !" when He made man.

But tragedy you failed to understand.
You could not guess the tears
That veiled Almighty eyes, nor knew the hand
Trembled, that modelled clay.

For you the serpent was a beast that crawls,
A slimy horror, wriggling on its way;
No monster that could wreck the golden halls
God-wasting evil, that defiled the day.

Bach wrote the "Passion" with the five great wounds
Tearing his soul, that have men's bodies torn.
You saw but sunlight—he the shadow too—
God made sin also—when He made the dawn.

TO A DEAD IDIOT

I want to talk to you so very badly,
You were so stupid once—yet understand
What Saints have worshipped, and what now I
dream of
You, who have crossed our breakers, unto land.

Tell me, do waves, in that strange far off country
Still, baying, strain their leashes at the stars,
And can the cry of tortured, hungry cities
Shatter the frozen silences of Mars?

I ask!—but do you hear me? Can you answer
Deep in the stillness of that cold grey place?
Or do your child's eyes gaze with their new
splendour
On the still calm of an Almighty Face?

WRITTEN IN AN AUTOGRAPH ALBUM

The sound of weary lute-strings in the evening
Twixt vespers and night,
Translucent sea-waves coiling like green serpents
Before the day's flight.

These lead my soul's feet through deserted gardens
To a great stream's side
And bid her rest her tired limbs 'mid thyme flowers
(Where the brown bees hide)

Then may my soul see, gazing on swift waters
Haply, her own eyes,
And trail her fingers in, to stay the current
Before night clouds the skies.

FLANDERS POPPIES

Here stands an altar of grey, rough-hewn stone
Weathered by seven centuries, and worn
By God-stained lips that priestly kisses gave
Daily, five hundred years ago, at dawn.
Then on this carved stone lay the soul of God
Where now two dusty Flanders poppies lie;
Here came the greatest mystery to pass,
Here fed the Deathless those about to die.
Where time is not, in some far state and strange
The empty years are counted for as nought
The changing of the elements is wrought.

.

The church smells musty, and the fading light
Dies 'neath the yew-trees, leaving us the night.

L'ATTENTE

Cold moonlight chills the June-enchanted earth,
The warm soil shivers 'neath the icy stars;
The marble steps are loved of the pale lights
They glitter like the snows on polar seas;
My silken dress is wet with dew—I hear
Nought but the sleepy whisperings of the trees.

I must go in, for the far east is grey
My eyes are heavy, all my limbs are numb.
The curtain falls behind me. When the day
Is come, I will go sleep; now through my tears
I watch the shadows of the ghostly clouds,
The waning moon looks down at me, and leers.

“IN THE SERE AND YELLOW LEAF”

Come out into the woods alone with me . . .
Into the autumn woods, where old and sad
Bereft of those strong arms that all the year
Were her custodians, Earth, a Brahminee
Puts on her fairest sari, wears her shroud
Gold edged, for her dead love, Hyperion.

.
Her queenly head is garlanded about
With shining leaves, as to the sacrifice
The heifer, wreathed with flowers, is led forth,
And for Hyperion Earth paints her lips
With scarlet berries, and with amethysts
Jewels her hands—that erstwhile held his face
Pressed close against her breast.

No price men set
Upon her dying finery, and yet
Clothed in the purple of her agony
Her own fierce love the flame to light her pyre
Kindling her limbs from her own heart on fire
Dying-in-state of old age and desire
She lifts our hearts and makes us comprehend
Somewhat the hurt and purport of her end.

VICE VERSA

I was born c'ld, and am, alas, too young
My soul is w'ary, y'et my limbs are strong;
I seek for quiet waters, and am flun'g
Into a tavern full of wine and song.

My soul is a young hound straining his thongs,
My body is decrepit and decayed;
I would go battle fiercely with all wrongs—
And yet my quivering sinews are afraid.

SHADOWS

Great pinewoods come down to the brink of the
pools of my soul

And bathe therein their feet.

They cast long shadows over it, within its depths

Their mighty shadows meet.

Great shadows bathe and sleep within

The deep pools of my soul.

They cleave the waters with their giant limbs,

Their ghostly voices roll

Through all the mazed and tangled cedar-woods

That grow around my soul.

“MULIER PERIGRINA”

Grey owl—light in a night-jar haunted forest
Where many mazed paths creep,
Amongst the oak and wych elm trees, to spaces
Where marshland flowers sleep.

Here stands a pilgrim, whose red lips are
bleeding,

Scarred by acacia thorn;
Her yielding eyes fighting in vain the darkness,
Her sandalled feet all torn,

She sought the mountains, e'er her feet came
roaming

Unto this prison land.
For on the boundaries of the shrine-filled country
Which was her goal, they stand.

But white mists rise around, her body shrouding
And from her hunted eyes
They hide far heaven, and snare-filled earth
forever

Slowly the white mists rise.

Thus goes she always, never the hills attaining,
Nor over the hills, her goal
Snared in the serpent-like embraces
Of the woods of her own soul.

EINSTEIN II

Only a bare half century of life
In which to find the Palace of t'ie Norns—
The gardens of the Hesperides—and leave
The heaped up glory of the world. To give
Oneself, rich with the corn and oil of harvest,
Yet seeing only stubble and a naked vine
Unto the garner—and to hear the trees
The pinetrees moaning sadly, creaking 'neath a
black crow's weight,
On All Soul's day—who heard the pigeons coo
When blade by blade, earth scented, the grass grew
On Lady Day—Ah, well, 'tis short indeed,
Only to live for years fifty all told
And yet—good God—at twenty, fifty's *old*!

OBRUERUNT •

(A May Evening in Oxford)

Here, for an hour,
To find that every door opens upon wide fields
Made strange with shadow patterns of far clouds;
Whilst peace no stir of traffic can assail
Drops from the golden poplar-trees, that stand—
Sentinels quivering with the weight they bear
Of armoured loveliness—on guard
Against the phantom army. Out of the mist high
towers
Pinnacle-crowned, challenge the night. The fields
Are wounded at the hands of light, that spears
With javelined shafts, nailing the white mist down
Opaque, invincible.
Now are come ghosts,
Giants that hide all day in May-green beechwoods
Or tread the high hills, cloud-encompassed
At whose still altars worship lonely herons.
These giants wade the mists, knee-deep, and pass
Through shadowed fields, and sleep enchanted
meadows
To the beleagured town.

REFLECTIONS

Like a green glass goblet you have coloured all
the love I poured into your heart
Till the transparence of it is become a cold green
flame,
Misty and still, yet with strange unrest about it,
that must flicker and start
As though my love were a wildness, that even your
quiet cannot tame.
But now that I have given you all, and all has
left me
I am so alone and undone; for I think you can
love only what I poured
Into your heart. For it is become part of you, and
you cannot see
That in the unquiet green flame, it is only your-
self you have adored.

MAY EVE
London-Oxford by 'bus

From London down to Uxbridge
The sky was daffodil,
And Ealing way and Acton
And Hayes, had all their fill
Of golden streets at evening
And sky of daffodil.

From Uxbridge to High Wycombe
All orange was the sky
With red and purple shadows that
Went leisurely drifting by
Whilst the big cars went quietly
Under the orange sky.

From Beaconsfield to Oxford
The sky was apple green
With a crescent moon a-climbing
'Mongst stars, with sky between;
Not orange now nor daffodil
But only apple green.

SEPTEMBER 1931

Since summer was not, why must winter be?
This year the red grapes ripened without sun;
Green still the mildewed corn, though harvest's
done;
The sodden leaves to gold change on each tree.
Septembrine woodsmoke fills the autumnal air;
But, cheated of our flowering May and June,
Given but robin's song for cuckoo's tune
We are not comforted; though years more fair
Bring back the swallows. Since our April's lost,
Though the bare boughs put on more verdant green
Next year, and August's loveliness be seen,
Yet no hereafter can make up the cost
Of these four wasted months to us, whose spring
Comes not again, since winter must death bring.

BALM IN GILEAD

When all our sodden English fields
With bungalows are desecrate,
Yet will the cloud-grey skies be swept
By mist, and rain will consecrate
The starveling poplar trees that grace
The country's smug, suburban face.

What though where trees once grew, and grass
The garden cities thickly crowd?
At night the tired earth shall smile
To see the stars, remote and proud
Tread quietly the heavens, and light
The empty spaces of the night.

When crazy pavement hides the soil
And trim herbaceous borders stand
Where cowslips grew, and daffodil
And bluebells carpeted the land
Behind the red brick chimneys high
Shall glow the many-coloured sky.

The sunset shall not need the streets,
Nor shall the winds less gently blow
Because on common land, and plough,
Semi-detached small villas grow,
And we, who hear the linnets sing
Shall know, here, once again, is spring.

: TOISON ROUGE

Oncques ne vit Jason
Toison
Si beau qu'ici

Cadmium red they to the tall house cling,
Most tenderly the motley bricks they cover
With Cyprus-umber foliage; their tendrils fling
About these vulgar Gothic walls, as though their
lover.

No Argus sails this crimson fleece to shear;
The passing crowds ignore the virgin creeper,
To scarlet madder and Mars violet blind;
This sterile harvest craves no sicklied reaper.

Yet is the glory of these leaves more rare
Than sunset orange or than sunrise gold
Nor questing Jason colour found so fair,
Nor Helen's cloak e'er fell in lovelier fold.

OCTOBER

Not silently, but with a quiet restlessness,
As though their scarlet called for earth's sad brown
Their pageant for the greyness of surrender
The leaves, in wise humility, fall down.

They flutter in our streets, invade unquestioned,
Our hearts, that summer's passing has left bare:
They whisper where love hides our tired faces
Our lips, October-saddened, may not care.

They creep between the bride-sheet, and they
murmur,
 About the hands of those but lately dead
 Kneeling to mourn our swallows, now we crush
them
 They dance in rooms from whence our kings are
fled.

Unhindered, unmolested, they have covered over,
The grass-green lawns, and filled the guttered caves.
Beneath their stillness, desolate, our souls lie coldly
Our empty arms encircle but dead leaves.

NAMVALU VULU

Where there is only silence and no sound intrudes
Where lonely, curved infinity in sorrow broods
Over the ageless quiet of the sands; -
Where the salt waves receive into their hands
Great Congo's waters sweet, on Bomma's plain,
Namvalu Vulu, lord of storm and rain
Holds his high court. Here are the tired clouds
come

That drift and drift about the journeying sun;
Over the snail-slow caravans the desert wind
Has blown fine dust, to make the camels blind —
The stubborn, blue-eyed camels. Zephyrs innocent
Here with tornados play; white squalls are spent
And frolic with light breezes. Wild typhoon
Now with the rainbow dances; Boreas with the
Moon

Scuds 'cross a spangled sky; the lightning fires
Jove's mighty thunderbolts with new desires.

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